



Fisheries and Oceans  
Canada

Pêches et Océans  
Canada

Sean Arran McPherson Approved by ADM

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## SCENARIO NOTE

### **MEETING WITH THE MINGAN ISLAND CETACEAN STUDY ON DECEMBER 11, 2018**

#### Overview

The Mingan Island Cetacean Study (MICS) wishes to meet with you to discuss:

1. Additional funding to support MICS activities
2. The federal government strategy for the protection of marine mammals
3. Investments in whale research, especially Atlantic Blue whales

MICS is a non-profit, charitable research organization based in both Canada and the United States, dedicated to ecological studies of marine mammals and marine ecosystems. Founded in 1979 by Richard Sears, MICS was the first organization to carry out long-term research of cetaceans in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and first to carry out long-term studies of the endangered Atlantic Blue whale. The principal study areas include the Quebec North Shore in the Mingan Island / Anticosti region, the Gaspe Peninsula and St. Lawrence Estuary. MICS is the curator of the North Atlantic individual identification catalogues.

#### Minister's Objectives

- Acknowledge MICS contribution to whale science and conservation.
- Communicate how the government has significantly increased funding towards marine mammal research and conservation; and
- Encourage MICS to continue its dialogue with government officials to identify further areas of collaboration.

#### Key Messages

- The government is committed to protecting marine mammals and to the recovery of those considered at risk, and has allocated significant additional new resources to that effect.
- We appreciate the contribution of all parties in helping to protect marine mammals, including the Mingan Island Cetacean Study.
- The Department will continue its dialogue with MICS to identify and evaluate further areas of collaboration.
- Enhancing protections of Blue whales is an area that we are beginning to focus on. Your expertise and contributions will be important to this process.

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### **1. Additional Funding to support MICS activities**

The key issue is anticipated to be related to additional funding to MICS from the federal government for research and monitoring activities, and especially related to Atlantic Blue whale.

Over the years, DFO's relationship with MICS has evolved from working independently to collaborating on various projects of mutual interest. It would be appropriate to recognize this increased level of collaboration, including the much appreciated participation of Dr. Christian Ramp from MICS in the North Atlantic Right Whale (NARW) peer review process which took place in Montreal the last week of November, 2018.

MICS will likely draw a comparison between the Atlantic Blue whale and NARW, and ask that additional resources be directed to Atlantic Blue whales, including research and monitoring. MICS activities are concentrated in the summer in the Northern Gulf of St. Lawrence, and are focused on monitoring the presence of large whales, identifying individual Blue whales, and taking biopsies and other samples for various purposes. Maintenance of the long term Blue whale identification catalogue is likely an area where MICS would appreciate receiving additional support. In the US, NOAA supports the maintenance of a similar catalogue for NARW. Catalogues allow tracking animal movements, and understanding many other aspects of the species' biology.

DFO's 2018-19 funding to support MICS funding is enclosed (Tab 1).

### **2. Federal government strategy for the protection of marine mammals**

Significant new investments in marine mammal monitoring, science, protection and recovery have been made since 2016. Recovery strategies and action plans for the 14 species of marine mammals listed as endangered (including the Pacific and Atlantic populations of Blue whales) or threatened under the *Species at Risk Act* have been developed and implementation has begun. Partners, such as MICS, are key in the implementation of many recovery measures identified.

The Marine Mammal Response Program to rescue marine mammals in distress has been augmented significantly. Changes were made this summer to the Marine Mammal Regulations under the *Fisheries Act* to prevent harassment and disturbance of marine mammals, including setting of approaching distances to that effect, in the case of Blue whales, 100m.

### **3. Investments for whale research**

Through Budget 2016, human resources for marine mammal science have increased by 40% and financial resources by 300%.

The Marine Environmental Quality initiative under the 2017 Oceans Protection Plan (\$26.6M/5 years) allocated resources to understand the impacts of underwater noise on Southern Resident Killer Whale (SRKW), St. Lawrence Beluga and NARW. Earlier this year, Minister Marc

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Garneau and Minister Johnathan Wilkinson, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, announced an additional \$167M over 5 years for the initiative to protect and recover whales, also with an emphasis on SRKW, St. Lawrence Beluga and NARW.

In addition, on October 31, 2018, DFO announced a further \$61.5M over 5 years to help SRKW recover. All these investments will benefit target species as well as many other whale species and marine mammals generally.

Canada has invested \$1.35 billion in Budget 2018 in the Nature Legacy. With these funds the federal government will support nature conservation and protection activities, in partnership with others. DFO's Species at risk program is in the process of identifying priority species and areas under the Nature Legacy.

NARW and Atlantic Blue whale are both listed as endangered under the *Species at Risk Act*, with comparable abundance levels in the Northwest Atlantic. The Blue whale, although the largest of the whale species, does not draw as much attention as NARW, as death of individuals generally go unnoticed (their body sink after death). Many Atlantic Blue whale detections were made in the main shipping corridors of the Gulf of St. Lawrence over the last 2 years, during surveys for NARW. The Atlantic Blue whale recovery action plan was finalized in July 2018. It includes a list of priority measures to be implemented by DFO and/or its partners.

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TAB 1

## DFO Funding to Support MICS Activities

In 2018-19, DFO contributed approximately \$85K to MICS for the following projects:

- Evaluating the risk of entanglement in fishing gear of Blue and Fin whales in the Northwest Atlantic, \$29K/year over 3 years starting in 2018-19
- Satellite tagging of Blue whales to better understand movements, approximately \$19K
- Blue whale biopsies to examine reproductive rate (\$8.7K). MICS provided samples in the 1990s, 2000s, and again since 2015. The purpose is to assess whether the extreme changes in climate (warm temperatures) observed since the early 2010s are beneficial or detrimental to Blue whales.
- Monitoring of NARW North West of Anticosti Island - \$30K (an additional \$15K for drone experiment by Transport Canada could not be disbursed given TC project did not unfold as planned).



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To: Catherine Blewett Date: DEC 07 2018  
Pour:

**Object:** MEETING WITH MINGAN ISLAND CETACEAN STUDY ON DECEMBER 11,  
**Objet:** 2018

From / Louise Laverdure, A/Director General, ESD      DEC - 7 2018  
De:

Via: Arran McPherson, Assistant Deputy Minister, EOS DEC - 7 2018

**Additional approvals:**  
**Autre(s) approbation(s):**

Sylvie Lapointe, ADM, Fisheries and Harbour Management

Patrick Vincent, RDG, Quebec Region



## Material for the Minister Documents pour le Ministre



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## Information

**Remarks:** This briefing note was developed in consultation with the following regions/sectors:

**Distribution:**

**Drafting Officer/  
Rédacteur:**

SIMON NADEAU (613-991-6863)/ S. Nadeau / kd



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Objet: \_\_\_\_\_

From / From: Louise Laverdure, A/Director General, ESD  
De: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: DEC 04, 2018

Via: Arran McPherson, Assistant Deputy Minister, EOS  
Via: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: DEC - 5 2013

Additional approvals:  
Autre(s) approbation(s):

Sylvie Lapointe, ADM, Fisheries and Harbour Management \_\_\_\_\_

Patrick Vincent, RDG, Quebec Region DL DEC 06 2018



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